

## **Sestina: Matilda**

**By Jemimah Halbert**

Something floats into the air

Floats and falls in her eye

Commonly known as dust

Everywhere, all-where in summer

It lands on her hair, her shoulders

Covering the tall-standing girl

Once mud, it reaches the girl

Reminding her of every other summer

Yearly life's burdens pile on her shoulders

Her childhood gone in the blink of an eye

Her baby-dreams disappear into air

These days the drought turns her home into dust

From ashes to ashes and dust to dust

Each time she wishes someone would encircle her shoulders

Or expects to find a tear in her eye

Her blessings and curses fly through the air

Collecting in crannies like fine mud dust

They'll all be gone by the end of summer

These people arrive in winter, stay 'til summer  
She sees their horses in clouds of red dust  
They arrive with smiles, shout greetings in dead air  
She stands, tall and strong, and looks them in the eye  
They pet her then ignore her: their ways with a girl  
But her back is strong; this place rests on her young shoulders

The men, they shrug their shoulders  
Remarking dryly on the heat of the summer  
Their faces and voices choked with dust  
These people are strangers, unknown to the girl  
There wouldn't be a stench of mistrust in the air  
If her father were here, twinkle in his eye

The men, they mutter 'an eye for an eye'  
Their scars and tattoos stark on their shoulders  
They came without warning, working the summer  
Filling the house and disturbing the dust  
In grief it was all too much for the girl  
She can't let go; she's weighed down by air

The girl hoists her life onto her shoulders  
And blinks from her eye the thick red dust  
She knows the summer is nearly done; rain is in the air

